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ABSTRACT

Findings from a comparative study of new and experienced urban principals that examined variables associated with work-related stress and role conflict are presented in this paper. A total of 27 male and female principals in a large, urban school district in the South were surveyed--13 first- and second-year principals and 14 experienced principals. Findings indicate that each group shared desired time priorities, actual time allocations, and general job satisfaction. Experienced principals reported greater role conflict, especially in central office interactions. A conclusion is that new principals enter the school system already socialized, with little role ambiguity. Recommendations are made for creating district-centered professional development programs and for redefining the central office/principal relationship. Two tables are included. (17 references) (LMI)

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Differences between New and Experienced Principals Within an Urban School System

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Differences between New and Experienced Principals Within an Urban School System

Previous studies on school administrators have identified two closely related problems: stress and role conflict (Bachararch, Bamberger, Conely, & Bauer, 1990). Assumptions behind these findings are that the problems of stress and role conflict are not only inevitable in public school administrative work (Fowler & Gettys, 1989; Gmelch & Swent, 1982), but also that new principals experience these problems to a greater degree (Spradling, 1989). A comparative study between new and experienced urban principals investigated variables associated with work related stress and role conflict. This study was done at the request of a large, urban school district which wanted information about how to support new and experienced principals on-the-job. The findings indicate that new principals in this system come to the job already socialized; while contrary to the above assumptions, experienced principals have greater role conflict. This article will explain the differences between the two groups and will offer a number of recommendations for improving principal-central office relations.

New Principals' Research

Urban school districts across the country face a twofold challenge with respect to new principals. The first is to identify and encourage talented individuals to serve as future school principals; the second is to support new principals once they are on-the-job. Empirical studies on new principals are

quite limited in scope and conceptual frameworks (Daresh, 1987; Fowler & Gettys, 1989; Spradling, 1989) and remains generally at the exploratory, hypotheses-generating stage. Overall, the two most pervasive findings are (1) that new principals do not clearly comprehend the precise nature of the job (Daresh, 1987), and (2) that role conflict is inherent in the job (Fowler & Gettys, 1989).

Daresh (1987) stated that new principals have multiple problems relating to role clarification, technical skill mastery, and interpersonal relationships. Fowler and Gettys (1989) identified a number of recurring themes facing new principals, including the issue of responsibility, certainty of authority, conflicting demands, time constraints, politics, peer support, and the steady stream of human interactions. In a secondary analysis using NASSP data to compare new with experienced principals, Spradling (1989) found that new principals work longer hours, feel they lack authority, and spend more time on student activities, the physical plant, and on community and teacher issues.

Socialization and stress

There are two theoretical constructs around which much of the data and research designs to study new principals are conducted: socialization and public school administrative stress. The first concept highlights the conflict created by organizational expectations versus individual personalities (Argyris, 1957; Getzels & Guba, 1957). Bridges (1965)

hypothesized that as principals gain experience and become socialized into their role, they tend to behave in a more bureaucratic and less idiosyncratic manner. In other words, socialization is a matter of adopting the system's values and attitudes while becoming proficient in the skills and knowledge of the role itself (Pascale, 1985).

Not all of the empirical evidence fully supports this hypothesis. Jones (1983) reported no relationship between role conflict and length of experience. Similarly, Osborne and Wiggins (1988) did not find that experience in the principalship was a significant factor in whether a high school principal sought to fulfill "his own individual personality needs or the institutional requirements of his role" (p. 4). On the other hand, Daresh (1987) reported that new principals have socialization problems in terms of the profession and within individual school systems. His distinction between the profession as a whole and the individual school system, however, may be most significant. That is, an aggregation of new principals across system or state boundaries would certainly limit the relevancy of any findings about socialization for a specific local context.

The second conceptual line of research focuses on the variable of stress in public school administrators (Gmelch & Swent, 1982; Lyons, 1990). While there are no studies comparing stress in new and experienced principals, the stress variables identified in administrative work related stress research are

similar to those factors which Daresh (1989), Fowler and Gettys (1989), and Spradling (1989) have found cause problems for new principals. The stress variables include time management, administrative constraints and compliance requirements, relationships with superiors around the issue of authority, interpersonal and professional relationships with teachers, community relations, technical skills such as budgeting and planning, coping with inadequate resources, and parent conflicts (Gmelch & Swent, 1982; Hiebert & Mendaglio, 1988; Jones, 1983; Lyons, 1990; Wax & Hales, 1987; Williamson & Campbell, 1987).

Applying stress research results to principals as a whole and to new principals in particular presents a number of theoretical and practical problems. The concept of stress itself is abstract and multidimensional. Although a number of studies (Gmelch & Swent, 1982; Hiebert & Mendaglio, 1988; Jones, 1983) have used the Administrative Stress Index (Gmelch & Swent, 1982), as the most comprehensive assessment of administrative stress, their findings are equivocal in terms of (a) the level of stress among public school administrators and (b) the ranking of individual factors said to cause stress. Variable results report low to moderate to high levels of stress, while the number one factor causing stress varies from the need to comply with rules to interactions with teachers. Studies using other methods and instruments also report variable findings.

In addition, within a school system, stress may not be viewed positively, but rather, is seen as a weakness. Therefore,

survey results indicating low or even moderate levels of stress among public school administrators may be illusory. In a qualitative study by Fowler and Gettys (1989), one principal is quoted as saying, "You definitely have to be a person that does not allow yourself to be under stress because being a principal you have the responsibility of protecting and looking after everybody" (p. 11). On the other hand, Kouzes and Posner (1991) found that 65% of the leaders in their study reported that stress both challenged and energized them. Stress was associated with "doing one's best" and is healthy. "It gets people moving. It is what stress researcher Hans Selye describes as 'eustress,' or positive stress" (p.41). In contrast, stress in school administrators is often associated with burnout (Wax & Hales, 1987) and to a variety of physical and mental illness such as fatigue, difficulty sleeping, low tolerance for frustration, etc. (Clarke, 1985).

Given the equivocal research findings with aggregated population samples, this survey study focused on comparing new and experienced principals within one specific school system. The items on the survey measure those variables identified by previous studies on new principals and on work related stress in public school administrators.

Method and Procedures

Subjects:

The entire population of first and second year principals from a large, urban school district in the south were surveyed

(N=14). Only one first year principal did not participate. A second group of experienced principals was matched on personal, professional, and school demographic variables. Since there was difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of surveys from the experienced principal group, additional experienced principals were asked to complete the survey without adhering to the matching criteria (see Table 1 below).

Age and years of experience were not very different between the two groups. Spradling (1989) had noted that new principals were being appointed at an older age than previously, and it appears so here as well. The biggest difference between new and experienced principals in Table 1 is the number of holders of the doctorate degree among the experienced principals. The implication is that the principals in this district pursue the degree after their appointment, rather than before.

Table 1.

Characteristics of New and Experienced Principal Sample Populations

	Male/Female	Race B/W	Age	Instructional Level	Education MA/+30/D	Total Yrs Experience
Inexperienced	**7/6***	**10/3***	**45**	**7E/2M/5Sr**	**10/4/0**	**16**
Experienced	**6/8**	**5/9**	**46**	**5E/4M/5Sr**	**4/5/5**	**20**

***one no response**

Instrument:

The survey questionnaire used in this study was adapted from a number of previous research efforts. The construct variables measured by the

instrument are as follows: instructional versus administrative emphasis, time management [desired and actual], the impact of external policy factors and constraints, job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and role conflict. Specifically, the questions on instructional versus administrative emphasis and the impact of external policy factors and system constraints were taken from an interview study of curricular-oriented principals conducted by Bogotch (1990). The multi-item scales for job satisfaction [4 items], role conflict [7 items], and role ambiguity [4 items] were used previously in published research and adapted by Bacharach, Bamberger, Conely, & Bauer (1990). Internal reliability and validity data were reported for the multiple item scales. Cronbach's Alpha on the school principal population resulted in the following strong subscale coefficients: the job satisfaction scale was .75; the role ambiguity scale was .62; the role conflict scale was .77 The other items measuring time management and the perception of sufficient or insufficient time per task were developed for this study. The instrument is attached as Appendix A.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all of the items on the survey. The interval data items were analyzed in terms of the subscale constructs of job satisfaction, role conflict, and role ambiguity. In addition to Cronbach's Alpha for internal reliabilities, independent T-Tests were calculated for each subscale as well as for each of the individual items on the survey. The latter results are discussed in terms of exploratory analyses. Evidence from the open-ended responses was also used to support the findings.

Results

The variables measured in this study included instructional versus administrative roles, time allocation by task [desired and actual], the impact of organizational policies and constraints on job performance, job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and role conflict. New principals reported that their instruction duties averaged 41% of their time as compared with 29% reported by experienced principals. The administrative emphasis of experienced principals (71%) was a consistent finding throughout the study. This administrative emphasis resulted in significant differences between new and experienced principals with respect specifically to the latter's perceptions of role conflict **vis a vis** central office policies.

In response to the time allocation items, both new and experienced principals stated that they **should** spend 40% to 33% respectively on program improvement. When program improvement was combined with planning, the **actual** times reported by the two groups were 33% [new] and 19% [experienced]. Not one experienced principal in the sample felt that the 19% devoted to program improvement/planning was sufficient. Overall, the most significant difference reported by the two groups related to the greater amount of time experienced principals felt they needed to spend on building management tasks. This difference also appeared in how the two groups felt about personnel matters. While both groups indicated almost identical times spent on personnel matters, new principals "worried about" teachers while experienced teachers "worried about" non-instructional personnel.

It was not differences between the two groups that was most obvious, rather it was how little were perceived differences between the way the two

groups actually allocated their time. No differences were reported for actual times in school-community relations, student services, and program and personnel evaluation. Moreover, a high percentage of both groups (79%) reported that the time devoted to central office business was sufficient. When the similarities on time allocation are combined with how closely both groups perceived their authority, responsibility, and role expectations, the question of socialization within this urban district is not an issue for in-service program development.

All of the principals were asked to respond to the impact of external policies and organizational constraints on their ability to lead. New principals reported that the school's community and parent group had the most negative impact. Community and parent issues were viewed as positive or neutral by experienced principals. For experienced principals, district policies had the strongest impact. Neither group felt that collective bargaining had a major impact. For new principals, money and the budget were the greatest obstacles, while for experienced principals personnel matters were viewed as obstacles to success. Both groups defined their accountability mostly in terms of students, although neither group ignored their superordinates in their overall responses.

Three multi-item subscales used in previous empirical studies (Bacharach, et al., 1990) were analyzed. New and experienced principals were analyzed in Table 2 with independent T-Tests for job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and role conflict. The only significant difference reported was for the variable of role conflict ($T=2.77$, $p=.01$).

Both groups of principals were generally satisfied with their jobs in terms of authority and expectations. New principals were somewhat more

satisfied that the job gave them the opportunity to do their best. The level of satisfaction for both groups fell between "somewhat dissatisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" to the question whether working conditions enabled principals to be effective.

Role ambiguity also produced similar responses between the two groups of principals in terms of certainty of authority, known responsibilities, and known expectations. Only for the item referring to proper time allocation did experienced principals express their ambiguity. Unlike Spradling (1989), time management presented less of a concern to new principals than to experienced principals.

The third subscale, role conflict, resulted in a significant difference between new and experienced principals (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparison of New and Experienced Principals on the Three Subscales

	Inexperienced (N=14)			Experienced (n=14)			
	Overall Means	Item Means+	SD	Overall Means	Item Means+	SD	T*
Job satisfaction	12.64	3.16	1.95	11.93	2.98	2.87	NS
Role ambiguity	16.05	4.01	2.92	15.57	3.89	2.14	NS
Role conflict	21.36	3.05	6.25	27.07	3.87	4.51	2.7*

+Based on Likert Scales:
Job satisfaction: 1-4
Role ambiguity: 1-5
Role conflict: 1-5

*P= .01

The specific areas of greatest difference were found in the experienced principals' perceptions of incompatible policies, the need to buck rules, extra assignments with adjustments,

inadequate resources to do the job, doing things differently, and having to work on "many unnecessary things." In each instance, new principals did not agree with their more experienced colleagues nor did they think these inter-organizational dynamics were true.

Discussion

Overall, the similarities between new and experienced principals were startling. Not only did the two groups express the same desired time priorities, but they also had similar actual time allocations. The attitudes towards job satisfaction and role ambiguity were also essentially the same. It is as if the new principals within this urban school district were socialized into the role of the principalship prior to assuming the job.

There were, however, a number of areas of significant differences which need further explanations. New principals gave more emphasis to instructional tasks than did experienced principals. Considering that new principals did not express an awareness of the inherent system conflicts and policy contradictions, they perceive that they have more time in which to devote to instructional and curricular activities. While the data may suggest that an instructional emphasis will dissipate with experience, there is no inferential basis to make reach this conclusion; just as it would be purely speculation to state that the practice of instructional leadership is about to become the norm - after 20 odd years of educational leadership research -

within the principalship.

The reality for experienced principals is that the district's central office is the primary source of conflict. While Fowler and Gettys (1989) found that role conflict was inherent in the principal's job itself, the data here suggest that role conflict differs between experienced and inexperienced principals such that the latter is more likely to be effected. That is, as principals come to understand how to be "successful," they identify how things should be done differently, what policies are incompatible, and what work is done unnecessarily. This level of district awareness was not evident in the responses of new principals, a finding consistent with Daresh (1987). Thus, while new principals appeared to be socialized into the role itself, they still lacked an understanding of the conflicts existing between the central office and school sites. Whereas Spradling (1989) reported that most aspects of the principalship were more troublesome to new principals than for experienced principals; it was not so in this urban district. Experienced principals were clearly more troubled.

To the extent that role conflict is one dimension of stress, it is experienced principals who are feeling stressed. The new principals in this study were satisfied with their job, certain about their role, and not experiencing conflict. Thus, the relationship between stress and the new principal cannot be supported here. Since veteran principals judge that the time allocated to central office responsibilities is sufficient, it

must be the quality of the relationship between the central office and principals - not the quantity - wherein lies both the problem and possible solution for reducing role conflict, if not stress itself.

Recommendations

An underlying assumption of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized beyond an individual school system. Therefore, the responsibility and appropriateness for increasing the awareness of new principals cannot come from research studies using aggregated population samples, a priori categories of stress or socialization, or from non-system specific graduate university coursework. Rather, principal induction and professional development must come from district-centered research and district programs.

In saying this, we are mindful of the major finding here, namely, that experienced principals experience greater role conflict, much of it caused by the district's system itself. It may be incongruous to expect a central office which is at odds with experienced principals' perceptions to be the purveyors of insight and innovation for new principals. In other words, given the dynamics suggested by this study, there is clearly a need to restructure the relationship between the central office and principals. But that is precisely the challenge which this urban district has accepted. Last year, in selecting a new principal for a school with a very troubled past, the central office supported the convening of a task force made up of forty members

including administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, community members, and students to examine the problems of the school and make some recommendations for improvement. The work of the task force lasted four months, but one of the results was a relatively smooth principal selection process. Why? Based on the task force's study and recommendations, it was clear what kind of individual was needed for the school and what kind of support would have to be given to the newly appointed principal. This kind of information is essential to principal applicants as well. Instead of accepting the principalship **as is**, new principals could define what resources they would need in order to become successful. Unfortunately, there is no district commitment to engage in so thorough a study for other schools. Thus, the issue of role conflict and principal-central office relations must be addressed using other strategies.

One solution is to give principals more autonomy so that the policy sources of conflict would no longer be factors. Any system in which the school site leaders react in terms of "bucking" rules must be dysfunctional and ineffective. Based on the findings of conflict, the next steps involve researching the following questions:

> What do principals mean when they say they "must do things differently?"
>
> Who determines the priorities when assignments are given without any adjustments to the one's already at hand?
>
> Which rules are most often "bucked?"
>
> What are the incompatible requests and from whom do they come?

What work is unnecessary and what who should be done differently?

In terms of educational leadership and school system innovation, the answers to these questions are essential. Future research should consider using case study ethnography to seek answers these questions.

We will recommend to the school system central office that it begin to improve its communication with principals. Nationwide, the role of central offices is being questioned. Not only do they suffer from tarnished images with school practitioners, but both the public and policymakers are concerned about central offices' role in managing fiscal accountability. The current movement towards school-based management and shared decision-making has elevated the need to redefine the relationship between principals and central offices so that school restructuring efforts can move forward.

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